

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET

WSDA Organic Program has developed guidelines to help producers understand organic standards as they relate to the use of mulches and weed barriers. USDA organic regulations define mulch as any material that serves to suppress weed growth, moderate soil temperature, or conserve soil moisture.

USDA organic regulations require producers to use management practices to prevent crop pests, weeds, and diseases. Weed problems may be controlled through mulching with fully biodegradable materials, or by using plastic or other synthetic mulches: Provided that, they are removed from the field at the end of the growing or harvest season. **7CFR §205.206**

Mulches and weed barriers are production inputs on organic farms. All mulches and weed barriers, synthetic or non-synthetic, must be included in your annual Materials Inventory.

Acceptable Mulches and Weed Barriers

Non-Synthetic Mulches

Non-synthetic mulches and weed barriers are acceptable for use in organic production. Some of the most commonly used non-synthetic mulching materials are manures, bark chips, sawdust, leaves, grass or flower cuttings, hedge trimmings, and straw. Request and maintain records regarding the source and content of any inputs to ensure they don't contain prohibited materials.

Synthetic Mulches

Acceptable synthetic mulches include biodegradable paper mulches from recycled sources (ex. black-and-white sections of newspapers), as well as plastic mulches, weed barrier fabrics, or row covers. Synthetic biodegradable mulches must meet specific standards to be acceptable.

In annual cropping systems, plastic mulch, weed barriers, or row covers must be removed after the crop is harvested. In perennial cropping systems, plastic mulch, weed barriers or row covers may be left in the field beyond the harvest season; however, these inputs must be removed before the plastic decomposes or breaks into pieces so that it is not possible to effectively remove all pieces from the soil.



Biodegradable mulch film products must be produced without GMOs or feedstocks. Additionally, they must meet specific criteria for compostability, biodegradation, and bio-based content as defined at §205.2. As of the printing of this publication, no biodegradable film products have been approved for use in organic agriculture. Contact WSDA Organic Program prior to the use of these materials.

Unacceptable Mulches and Weed Barriers

- Newspaper or other recycled paper with glossy or colored ink.
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)
- Biodegradable mulch film that does not meet the required standards

Additional Resources

Biodegradable Biobased Mulch Film Definition: USDA Organic Regulations §205.2

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic>

NOP Guidance: Allowance of Green Waste in Organic Production Systems (NOP 5016)

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/content/usda-address-green-waste-compost-ruling>

Cooperative Extension: Mulching for Weed Management in Organic Vegetable Production

<http://www.extension.org/pages/62033/mulching-for-weed-management-in-organic-vegetable-production>



WSDA Organic Program
PO Box 42560 | Olympia WA 98504-2560
(360) 902-1805 | organic@agr.wa.gov
<http://agr.wa.gov/organic>